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Hospital to vote on NewLight Wednesday night

The Memorial Hospital of Texas County Board of Control will meet Wednesday at 6 p.m. in another special session to consider a contract with Austin, Texas-based NewLight Healthcare, a hospital management firm. The Board met to consider the contract on April 10, but took no action. At the beginning of last week's meeting, John Board asked that the record show that he had never seen this contract before the board meeting. The 45-page contract was looked over by the board and several changes were recommended. The Board voted to make amendments and allow NewLight two weeks to make the changes discussed in their contract before meeting again and reviewing the contract for possible agreement. Only one week has passed. The agenda includes action to vote on the NewLight contract, as well as action to allow NewLight to bring in an interim Chief Executive Officer, followed by an executive session to determine who that person will be.

The Daily Herald learned Tuesday that NewLight President Todd Biederman was involved with Blackhawk Healthcare, which operated hospitals in Mangum, Okla., as well as in Bastrop and Rockdale, Texas. According to a 2011 Mangum Star article, Blackhawk sold the hospital to Kevin Owens, principal backer of Hospital Management Services, following layoffs and the closing another Blackhawk hospital in Bastrop, Texas in November 2010. Blackhawk closed the hospital in Bastrop, and was sued five days later for a debt of more than \$2 million. Owens also took over operations of the Rockdale hospital, according to RockdaleReporter.com in a December 2010 story. The Rockdale hospital was on the verge of closing at the time. Some in Guymon believed Biederman's involvement with Blackhawk would result in similar problems in Guymon. But Biederman left Blackhawk in April 2010 — some seven months before the controversy started with Blackhawk — because the company was taking a direction he wasn't comfortable with. He was not involved with any of the closings or layoffs that took place with Blackhawk. "We did some amazing things (at Blackhawk)," Biederman said. "We saved the Mangum hospital. It was ready to close and they are still open today." Dr. Dustin Lively, DDS, a member of the Mangum hospital board, said Biederman runs a "Very honest, open, up-front business. What they set out to do, they seem to accomplish." Blackhawk hired a new CEO and he was taking the company in a direction that I didn't want to go in, so I left and started my own company, NewLight Healthcare," Biederman added. "The new CEO just took it in a (different) direction. Several people left after he came on board." "What occurred at Blackhawk was out of Todd's control after he left," said Lee Hughes, CEO of Cimarron Memorial Hospital in Boise City. NewLight took over management of that hospital two years ago. When NewLight took over, the hospital was barely making payroll and was in dire financial straits. "It hasn't been a bed of roses since then, we're still struggling financially, but now we have a face and a person on site who can manage the hospital, plus they brought in a CFO who's able to get our numbers together, he shows us our progress, they've been a great help," said Paul Toon, chairman of the Cimarron Memorial Hospital board in Boise City. "To me, I really regret not doing it much sooner." "We're focused on being of service and finding areas where rural hospitals need assistance," Biederman said. "We had bumpy times in Boise City. We had to make some tough decisions. The key to success in Guymon is that the board and the management team and the management company and the doctors all need to be aligned and then that's when you can solve problems and make the best decisions and the hospital will move back into a positive financial direction." The physicians of Memorial Hospital of Texas County voted in February to recommend that NewLight manage the hospital. In addition to managing Cimarron Memorial Hospital in Boise City, NewLight brought in a part-time Chief Financial Officer to the hospital in Beaver. The Board of Control voted March 27 to recommend the Texas County Commissioners pursue a leasing option. But the County Commission rejected that recommendation two days later. In the past month, three board members have resigned — Jim Webster was the first, Dr. Wayne Manning resigned following the vote on March 27, and Dallas Mayer resigned on March 29 following the County Commission vote. At last week's meeting, Mary Beth Ebersole, Chair of the Board of Control, noted that with or without the management firm, "If something goes wrong, the hospital would still be held liable. We are the ones that are responsible. This board has a responsibility to look at what's best for this hospital." Wayne Johnson, the local board's newest member, was in favor of NewLight at last week's meeting. "What I'm trying to say, is because of the time constraints and the money running out, I don't think

3247 NE Hwy 54 • Guymon, OK 73942
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we have a choice anymore. I think that New Light is a good choice, whether it's the best of the best, I don't know," Johnson said. Christie Kennelly and Trudy Hart contributed to this report.

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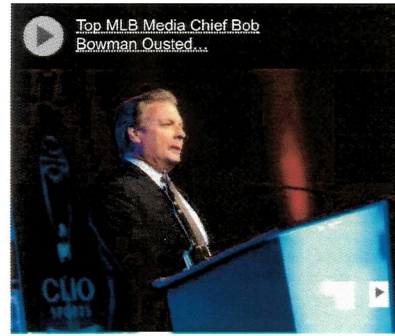
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